

Rehearsal Notes for Handbell Directors

Hudson Valley Handbell Festival

David Harris

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GENERAL COMMENTS

The composers of these pieces have provided some of this information. In general, close attention to the markings in the music and of course, knowing the music well enough to be able to watch the conductor are the keys to a successful performance.

TAKE TIME TO LOOK OVER THE SCORE

Usually, the composer gives us the notes we need. Each composer identifies *dynamics, dynamic changes, special techniques, tempo markings, etc.* Most rehearsal notes are nothing more than reminders of things the composer has already written in the score. Tempos are also subject to change depending on the acoustics.

As director, make notes in your score to remind ringers of these locations, especially in the midst of problem or busy spots. These places often have the ringer so occupied to “get the notes” that the “music” is lost. PRACTICE these spots to the extremes - tempos faster and slower than marked, *fortes* really loud, *pianos* really soft. Anything marked with options for marts, plucks, mallets or thumb damps should be practiced with each as acoustics may determine which technique sounds best.

IDENTIFY TRANSITIONS

The big “hot spots” in music are the *transition spots*. These are identified by *key or time signature changes, tempo changes or bell changes without key change*. Be especially attentive during all tempo changes marked in the score (either new tempos, or *accelerando* / *ritard* markings). At these points, it will **not** be optional to watch the conductor!

Though not necessarily a transition, PAGE TURNS must be practiced as well. These usually come in combination, especially in the higher levels of literature. Rehearse all transitional sections from 4-5 measures before they occur until a few measures into the new section. Don't stop! Identify what ringers did well and give a specific expectation for the next run. i.e.—“Let's work on dynamics this time” rather than a general “let's try that again”. Your ringers will respond well focusing on one specific task for repetitions.

Thank you for your preparation for the event! I very much look forward to our making music together, and am also looking forward to meeting you! Feel free to email me at rringer@rr.org with any specific questions you might have.

SPECIFIC MUSIC NOTES

Massed: Gavotte (from Symphony No. 4) / Tucker

-- If you listen to the demo recording, this is a bit under tempo for my taste. Sondra suggests a tempo similar to this orchestra recording: <https://youtu.be/dM2vtsBtp7o> I imagine in our massed setting we will be somewhere in-between.

-- From Sondra Tucker: *It would probably be just historical notes about who William Boyce was, and his 8 symphonies for (mainly) string orchestra, which are utterly charming. So when ringers do the techniques the effect that they always want to go for is classical grace and clarity and sophistication and balance. This Gavotte was originally scored for strings and horn.*

-- *Boyce was an English composer (1711-79) who sort of straddled the Baroque and Classical eras. He's not as Classical as Mozart, but not as contrapuntal as Bach. He was Master of the King's Musick, and organist at the Chapel Royal, but he eventually became too deaf to continue. In his retirement from performing he created editions of the works of Byrd and Purcell, among others. His instrumental music was forgotten after his death, but his church music remained in the repertory. There's been a bit of revival of his music in the 20th century, and Prince Harry and Meghan Markle used the opening movement of Boyce's First Symphony as one of their wedding recessionals.*

Massed: Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho / Thompson

-- We will pluck the sections marked “PL/Mallets” where possible.

-- Bass ringers: Be prepared for measure 5 where you switch from a ring to a pluck technique.

-- Measures 5 through 9: All ringers that aren't plucking here – click your mallet sticks together on beats 2 and 4.

-- Don't be confused by the half notes (measures 17, 34 and 51) that are marked with a staccato dot. These notes **ARE** short, plucked notes – this was just a cleaner way of notating the bass line

Massed: Lost in the Night / Moklebust

-- Just one comment....disregard the footnote about E flats for the ending, we will do E naturals as written in the score.

Massed: Song of Peace / Sherman

-- The beginning of this piece should be played with very little circular motion. Strike the chords and "stick" them (freeze with the arm extended), helping to provide the "harsh and brittle" feeling that Arnold has asked for here. Watch INTENTLY during the first 9 measures, as we'll stretch out each measure a little longer than it's indicated value (basically, put a "tenuto" on each half note).

-- Move the ritard in m43 to the middle of m42.

-- Add a fermata over the C5 in m44 (we'll hang on that for a while).

-- The Mart-lifts in m61 and m65 should be LVED through the entire measure.

-- Add a fermata over the whole note in m74.

-- Add a ritard on beat 3 of m77

-- Add a fermata on m78 (there won't be a beat pattern in m78 and m79, so you'll have to watch!)

-- In m80 through m86, every 2 measures (80, 82, 84, 86) we'll add more choirs, starting from the front of the massed ringing area.

We'll start with the front several rows playing softly at m80, and then add more rows at 82 and 84 and then all will play at 86. (we'll obviously have to work this out during the massed rehearsals, but I just wanted to give you an idea of what we'll be doing here).

-- At m88 through m95, we won't sing (yet!), but the top melody note should be played on chimes. At m96 through the end, the melody should be played on both bells and chimes.

-- We **won't** take the repeat back to m96 from m111.

-- As for the singing part (this is a bit hard to explain, so please ask questions if you don't understand!). First of all, think of the "Dona Nobis Pacem" vocal part as the three traditional parts that we often sing. These parts are spelled out here:

- The vocal part written in the handbell score at m88 we'll call part A.
- The vocal part written in the handbell score at m96 we'll call part B.
- The vocal part written in the handbell score at m104 we'll call part C.

-- The handbells will play the parts as they see them in the score, but we'll sing as follows:

- When we get to the handbell part at m88: No singing, just introduce the "Dona..." melody on chimes.
- At m96: bells and chimes are playing the melody indicated (no doubling), but we'll sing part A in unison.
- At m104: bells and chimes are playing the melody indicated, but each choir will divide into 3 equal-sized parts and sing part A, part B, and part C at the same time during this section.
- At m112: All singing stops, melody on both bells and chimes through m115.

Coppers: Passion Prophecy / Moklebust

From Cathy Moklebust: *Isaiah 53:4-5 is the basis for this musical interpretation of the imagery created by the scripture passage, which says, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." The music begins somberly, moving to a more intense, driven section, which represents Jesus' determination to complete the gruesome task he has been given in order to fulfill the prophecy. The music ends calmly, representing the peace and healing we have received through Jesus' Passion.*

-- For much of the piece, we'll be looking at 2 measure phrases.... so slight crescendo in measure 1, decrescendo in measure 2, up in measure 3, back in measure 4, etc. etc.

-- Write in a crescendo starting the middle of measure 26 through the fermata in measure 28.

-- The end of measure 28 (after the fermata) is still slow, the "a tempo" isn't until measure 29.

-- The tempo change in measure 38 is very subtle(quarter = 69, and previously quarter was = 66), so the accelerando in measure 37 is not that big of a deal.

-- Relative to the chords in the random ringing in measures 50 through 58: The chords should change over a few seconds, try not to have all ringers change notes at the same time ... let one chord slowly "evolve" into the next.

-- Change the "R" to an "LV" in measures 53, 55 and 57.

-- Between measures 53 and 56 – there will basically be a fermata in each measure (I will not count beats throughout these measures, just cues for the next approaching chord or phrase).

-- The molto ritard in measure 75 won't start until beat 2.

-- I find this piece to be very powerful, and is one of my favorites to do in a massed setting. I hope you find it enjoyable as well.

Coppers: Wade in the Water / Eithun

From Sandy Eithun (she recently did this with her school group, so she had these comments):

- *The opening bass solo—they initially over-damped which caused it to have a strange feeling of separation. I told them they could let their pitches “bleed” together a bit. Not an LV, but not so much separation. I told them to “LV until it sounds icky”*
- *There are obvious crescendos in this piece that create a sense of anticipation that “something is coming.” I really had to work with them yesterday on not starting those phrases “too big,” ie: m’s 16, 37 and 79 into 84. That feeling is entirely lost when there’s no room to go with the crescendo.*
- *Having that lone Eb6 at 67 was also something we drilled....damping everything out at the end of the previous measure.*
- *The obvious issue in the piece is the battery bells coming out with the melody at 59 and the outer voices pulling back*

Tins: Waltz on “Hyfrydol” / M. Eithun

A few comments from Mitchell Eithun:

- *The figure that is in the battery starting at m. 27 appears in the treble clef starting at m. 54.*
- *At treble clef obligato at m. 62 is just a faster version of the main Hyfrodol melody (with a few added notes).*
- *There's an "easter egg" in m. 138-141. The brief melody here is adapted from the hymn tune Jefferson, which is a tune commonly accompanies the hymn "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus" (which is usually sung to Hyfrodol).*

Tins: Passacaglia in C Minor / Gramann

- In general, we should think of this in 8 measure phrases... so, for example a slight crescendo m1-m4, and slight decrescendo m5-m8. Continue that feeling throughout.
- in the m17-m24 section, decrescendo on the quarter notes from beat 2 to beat 3 (just don't play beat 3 too loudly).
- in the m33-m40 section, decrescendo on the descending eighth note lines beat 1& through the end of each measure
- m41 – be ready to play very soft here for a wonderful contrast - in the treble, change the mp to a p, and in the bass change the p to a pp
- m49 – big accent on the downbeat (treat this as a subito forte)
- m64 – ritard on the swings here
- m65 – m 71 – accent the 2nd beats where the shakes hit

From Christine Braden, our Local Director

Blessed Assurance:

Please read David Harris' "General Comments" as they certainly apply here. Cynthia Dobrinski has clearly identified the dynamics she wishes to have in this piece.

We also have several "transition spots" which need your attention, especially in measures 16, 24, 44, 51 and 65.

Here are the reminders for what is indicated in the music.

- We will strive for a tempo marking of 66-69 at the beginning. The piece will be conducted in 3.
- At measure 16, the tempo will speed up and we'll look for more intensity as we crescendo. Please watch for the "all damp" signs which appear frequently (beat 3 of m. 12,16, etc.)
- At measure 24 we will slow down a little.
- Beginning with the 3rd beat of measure 35, the bass needs to predominate as they have the melody all the way to measure 51.
- Be ready for the key change at m. 44.
- At m. 51 we will once again increase the tempo.
- We will slow down again at m. 59.
- We will ritard in m. 65 and the 3rd beat will be subdivided.